

# The Indian Advocate.

Devoted to the Interests of the Indian Missions.

Vol. X.

OCTOBER, 1898.

No. 4.

## INDIAN LORE.

The seicha or flat pipe is the sacred tribal medicine of the Arapaho. According to the myth it was given to their ancestors at the beginning of the world after the Turtle had brought the earth up from under the water. It was delivered to them by the Duck, which was discovered swimming about on the top of the water after the emergence of the land. At the same time they were given an ear of corn, from which comes all the corn of the world. The Arapaho lost the art of agriculture when they came out upon the buffalo plains, but the sacred pipe, the Turtle long since changed to stone, they have cherished to this day as their great medicine. The pipe, turtle and ear of corn are preserved among the northern Arapaho in Wyoming who claim to be the "mother people of the tribe. They are handed down in the keeping of a particular family from generation to generation, the present guardian being Weasel Bear.

The three sacred things are preserved carefully wrapped in deerskins, and are exposed only on rare occasions, always within the sacred tepee and in presence of but a small number of witnesses, who take this opportunity to smoke the sacred pipe and pray for the things which they most desire. The pipe itself is of stone, and is described as apparently made in double, one part being laid over the other like the bark of a tree, the outer part of both bowl and stem being of the regular pipe-stone, while the inner part of both

is of white stone. The stem is only about ten inches long, while the bowl is large and heavy, with the characteristic projection for resting the end upon the ground. Both bowl and stone are rounded but with a flange of perhaps an inch in width along each side of the stem and up along the bowl.

From this comes its name of seicha or "flat pipe." When exposed on such occasions, the devotees sit around the fire in a circle, when the bundle is opened upon the ground so that all may see the sacred objects. The medicine keeper then lights the pipe and after taking one or two whiffs passes it to the one next him, who takes a single whiff and passes it on to the next. It thus goes turnwise around the circle. In taking the seicha the devotees do not grasp the stem, as when smoking on other occasions, but receive it upon the outstretched palm of the right hand, smoke and pass it around the circle. The flanges along the side of the pipe allow it to rest flat upon the hand. After all have smoked the medicine man recites the genesis myth of the origin of the land, and the manner in which the pipe and the corn were given to their ancestors. The corresponding myth of the Cheyenne occupies "four smokes" (i. e. four consecutive nights) in the delivery, but I am unable to state whether or not this is the case with the Arapaho. So sacred is this tradition held that no one but the medicine man of the pipe dares to